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THE NATURE OF NATIONAL WILL IN OPERATIONS OTHER-THAN-WAR

LT COL JEFF BROWN/CLASS OF 1998
COURSE 5602
SEMINAR K

FACULTY SEMINAR LEADER
COL WIENERS

FACULTY ADVISOR
LT COL CLODFELTER

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The Nature of Will in
Operations Other-than-War

In August 1982 the United States led a multi-national force into Beirut to provide security while Palestinian fighters evacuated by sea following an Israeli invasion of Lebanon The Marines completed their mission within a month, but quickly returned following the massacre of Palestinian refugees by Israeli supported Lebanese militias The Marines now had an open-ended mission of stabilizing the country while the Lebanese government regained control [1] They were still there on October 23, 1983 when a truck bomb blew up the Marine barracks, killing 241 people Less than five months later, the United States pulled out, washing its hands of the entire effort

Ten years later, the United States led Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia to provide security for desperately needed famine relief operations Although the relief operations went well, United States forces were soon drawn into a nation-building exercise with which the warring Somali clans were far less willing to cooperate On October 4, 1993, a group of Army Rangers was ambushed and relief helicopters shot down, killing 15 Americans and subjecting the American people to the spectacle of American bodies being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu As in Beirut, the United States soon washed its hands of the whole effort, pulling out its troop in March 1994

In both cases the United States gave up at the first significant setback Why? The United States' efforts had enjoyed some level of success up to that time and, although the original missions of the operations had expanded, the United States military could easily have increased its strength to prevent similar disasters from reoccurring The answer lies not in these areas of

[1] Agnes G Korbani, *US Intervention in Lebanon, 1958 and 1982* (New York Praeger Publishers, 1991), 53

policy or strategy, but rather in understanding the role of national will in the United States, its sources and, most importantly, its limitations

The Role of National Will

Clausewitz proposed that national will—or, to use his term, passion—was part of a trinity comprising the nature of war passion, reason, and chance Passion is the realm of the people, reason, expressed as policy, is the realm of the government, and chance, expressed as the complexity and friction of war, is the realm of the military commander [2] Each element of the trinity affects the others National will both compels and constrains policy makers Commanders' strategies indirectly reflect national will by linking military objectives to political objectives National will directly affects commanders through its impact on troop morale, recruiting, and limits on acceptable losses for a given strategy

Clausewitz's concept of the role of will reflected the times in which he lived He wrote from the perspective of Napoleonic Europe where democracies were a novelty and war had been the normal state of existence for several hundred years He could not have imagined a superpower democracy like the United States where limited war would be taken to such an extreme that it would no longer be war, but rather military operations other-than-war Under such conditions, his concepts of the role of will may no longer be sufficient

Clausewitz argued that will should be kept in balance with the other legs of the trinity "like and object suspended between three magnets" [3] To Clausewitz, the people's passion was a spontaneous product of new-born nationalism, to be used and controlled by sovereigns in

[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. and trans Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton Princeton University Press, 1976), 89

response to threats Quite the opposite is true today in the United States where obeying the will of the people is the primary concern of policy makers with an eye on the next election For us, national will is not an equal member of the trinity, but rather the preeminent leg—controlling, not under the control of, policy makers and driving them to action or inaction with equal ease

Clausewitz also argued that passions for war "must be inherent in the people "[4] His Europe was a place where wars for the survival of the nation were the norm and colonization—the 18th century version of military operations other than war—was, as much as anything else, a way to finance the military machine necessary for survival in Europe The national will for such undertakings was a natural outgrowth of the survival instinct[5] In the United States, however, survival is no longer an issue The will to employ military forces for operations other-than-war must come from other sources

Sources of National Will

National will can arise from sources internal or external to the people Internal or *core* national will is the manifestation of a nation's desire to survive It is Clausewitz's "passion" directed upward from the people to policy makers in the face of a threat Its origins in the survival instinct make it the most potent form of will, the most resilient in the face of adversity, and the most likely to make sacrifices acceptable However, for the United States, it is also rarely seen Given our protective geography, the nuclear threat of the cold war and the threat to the South's way of life during the Civil War are perhaps the only two instances in our history where *core* will has been felt

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

Externally generated will can take three forms *reaction*, *political*, or *third-party* will Reaction will arises in response to a dramatic event and usually takes the form of revenge, as with Pearl Harbor Like core will, it is upward generated, driving policy makers to action and, like Pearl Harbor, it can be sustained in the face of adversity

Political will is a downward directed will where policy makers attempt to create a national consensus for a proposed policy Consensus can appear as active support reflected in polls or Congress or, more typically, it can appear as the absence of organized, vocal opposition

In the former case, policy makers generally draw on emotional themes such as physical or economic survival, democracy, honor, or opposition to totalitarian and communist regimes The justification for Operation DESERT STORM typifies political will President Bush painted images of both an honorable America defending our allies and a demonic Saddam Hussein in order to induce Congress, reflecting national will, to formally support the operation

In the later case, policy makers use the same emotional images, but emphasize the benefits and minimize the costs and risks to create national acceptance for an action Announcements of strict time limits on operations or the use of overwhelming force in the face of seeming low threats are common ways to invoke this form of political will

Third-party will is created when the mass media or a special interest group (usually acting through the media) stirs national passions through a sense of outrage or guilt It is the weakest form of national will, but, in the age of CNN, it is rapidly emerging as a major force in the United States policy process Recent operations in Bosnia and Ruwanda are examples of third-party will where daily images of genocide created pressures to respond to situations where no obvious vital national interest existed

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[5] "Modern wars are seldom fought without hatred between nations ", von Clausewitz, *On War*, 138

Eroding Influences on National Will

Regardless of the source of national will, it is not a constant Once aroused as a foundation to implement policy, leaders cannot assume it will retain its intensity To sustain a policy, national will must be constantly refreshed in the face of the inevitable forces of erosion time, information, and events

Time is the most consistent enemy of national will It takes a certain amount of psychological energy and focus for a people to create and sustain the will for any policy As other issues capture people's attention or people tire of the sacrifices demanded by the policy, public support erodes In the absence of renewed stimulus, national will eventually becomes national acquiescence

Information flow in the era of live television and satellite feeds can quickly destroy national will The same CNN factor that can create third-party will can end it The cumulative violence and carnage of modern battlefields may be no greater than in the past, but the live, graphic images of battle beamed into our living rooms gives war a gruesome immediacy absent in the glorified written accounts and newspaper photographs of previous ages Only an intense national will can withstand these images and remain focused on the policy objectives

Finally, national will is subject to a continuous weighing of the costs and benefits of a policy When the benefit sought is national survival, national will can remain firm in the face of incredibly high costs But when national will stems from an external source, it exists far closer to the cost-benefit margins Mission creep, battlefield losses, terrorist attacks, or enemy propaganda can quickly change the cost-benefit calculation

As eroding influences work, either individually or collectively, policy makers must constantly reassess the conditions and assumptions that formed the basis for the original policy For the United States, national will is a critical "means" to a policy "end" Even if ends and means are in concert at the beginning of an operation, as conditions change policy makers must reassess their means and ends calculations, adjusting their policy if necessary Failure to do so invites the type of disasters that occurred in Beirut and Mogadishu

Beirut and Mogadishu Revisited

Although our interventions in both Lebanon and Somalia resulted from a complex mixture of political, economic, and humanitarian motives, a review of these operations—purely from the standpoint of national will—highlights the interplay of national will, eroding influences, and the dangers of a disconnect between policy and will

In Beirut, political will predominated The Reagan administration justified our 1982 deployment to Congress and the public in terms of cold war conflict where Lebanon had become a battleground between our ally, Israel, and the Soviet ally, Syria [6] It was to be a "short-term mission that could be quickly fixed and whose consequences could be easily anticipated "[7] Policy makers successfully created a minimum level of political national will

However, in the year that followed, our national will deteriorated to mere tolerance as eroding influences began to have an effect Above all, the cost/benefit ratio changed What was originally justified as a clearly defined, quick fix to allow the Palestinians time to evacuate,

[6] Korbani, *U S Intervention in Lebanon*, 53
[7] Ibid, 86

became a poorly defined, open-ended effort in nation building [8] Regardless of whether or not the advertised benefit was still valid, the cost, in terms of time, dollars, and potential risk increased tremendously As an open-ended effort the simple passage of time without a payoff also contributed to the erosion of will Finally, the media played its part After fourteen months of watching our embassy being bombed, Marines being fired upon, usually without returning fire, and nationally syndicated political cartoons depicting Marines as ducks in a shooting gallery[9], the arguments for a cold war balance of power contest became a distant memory

Together, these factors left our passion for political objectives in Lebanon fragile at best When the Marine barracks was bombed, our passion finally cracked The cost exceeded the benefit to the extent that our national will reversed itself Despite President Reagan's desire to continue the mission, the rest of Washington developed "pullout fever", forcing the rushed withdrawal of our troops in February 1984 "amid ridicule from the French [allies] and utter disappointment and despair from the Lebanese "[10]

In Somalia, third-party will predominated A variety of outside influences worked on both the American people and the government Images of starving children, in what was called "a lovely television war" came into our homes nightly, playing on America's humanitarian self-image [11] American's desire to be seen as religiously and racially unbiased was also a factor, as Muslim nations pointedly asked why the United States was unwilling to help Muslim people in Somalia or Bosnia Finally, the United Nations, with the prodding of relief agencies, passed a resolution calling for protection for relief workers, many of whom were American [12] The result

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[8] Ibid, 122
[9] Benis M. Frank, *U S Marines in Lebanon, 1982-1984* (Washington D C. History and Museums Division, Headquarters U S Marine Corps, 1987), 64
[10] George P Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph My Years as Secretary of State* (New York Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 230-231
[11] "The Blind Eye of Television", *U S News and World Report*, 18 January, 1993, 84+
[12] "Chronology Background to Operation Restore Hope", *U S Department of State Dispatch*, 21 December, 1992

was a strong third-party national will expressed in a 79% public approval rating for the initial deployment in December of 1992 [13]

But, as in Beirut, artificially induced national will proved fleeting in the face of changing costs and risks In March 1993 the mission changed from a U S led relief effort to a United Nations led nation building effort, with a drastically reduced US combat troop presence At the same time, the leading Somalia warlord, Mohammed Adid, decided a successful nation building effort might not leave him in charge and escalated the violence Yet, if the new mission, lower troop levels and increasing violence caused policy makers to reassess the costs and risks, it was not reflected in the overwhelmingly passed Congressional resolution approving the new mission [14]

However, as the American public saw the violence escalate it certainly made a reassessment Media scenes of starving, grateful people became scenes of looted warehouses Scenes of overwhelming American power and compliant Somalis became scenes of limited U S power and reemerging Somali violence in an open-ended mission Scenes of the United Nations promoting the noble cause of famine relief became scenes of the United Nations taking sides in a civil war Thus, by the end of September, just a week before the Ranger raid, only 43% of Americans approved of involvement and 46% disapproved [15] Time, an abundance of graphic information, and dramatically altered costs and risks, had eroded national will to the point that continuing American involvement reflected momentum rather than national will

When the Rangers were attacked on 4 October, even the momentum disappeared The attack could very easily have reinvigorated our national will, in the form of revenge-driven reaction will In fact, President Clinton's announcement of an immediate doubling of American

[13] "When to go, When to Stay", *Time*, Oct 4, 1993, 40+
[14] J F O McAllister, and others "Anatomy of a Disaster", *Time*, Oct 18, 1993, 40+

combat troop strength in Somalia seemed to anticipate a fresh mandate for action [16] But the reaction will failed to take hold in the face of our continued inability to define the mission in Somalia beyond taking revenge on Aidid Thus, in the face of intense Congressional pressure reflecting the now reversed national will to disengage, the Clinton administration, within a week of the bombing, announced our complete withdrawal by the end of March 1994 [17]

The lesson of Beirut and Mogadishu is not that the United States does not have the national will to conduct operations other-than-war in the face of setbacks The lesson is that in operations other-than-war, national will, while strong enough to initiate an operation, is nonetheless fragile and does not necessarily stay strong enough to sustain an operation—especially in the face of the mission creep to which the United States is so prone

As policy makers balance ends, ways, means and risks, they must treat this fragile national will as if it were a means, subject to forces that degrade or destroy it As missions change, risks increase, or strategies evolve, policy makers must constantly assess national will to ensure it still constitutes sufficient means to the desired end And for that they must understand it In war, Clausewitz admonishes statesmen that their "most far reaching act of judgment" is to understand the nature of war,[18] but in operations other-than-war, it may be more important for them to understand the nature of will

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[15] "When to go, When to Stay, 40+
[16] "Anatomy of a Disaster", 40+
[17] John R Bolton, "Wrong Turn in Somalia." *Foreign Affairs*, (January/February 1994) 65
[18] von Clausewitz, *On War*, 88

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